

Alumni take anti-bias curriculum to conference

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Four recent graduates of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh who teach first grade at Clay Lamberton Elementary School in Berlin, Wis., presented at the National Association of Multicultural Education Conference in New Orleans.

Jaime Bartol, Penny Graham, Jen Kouba and Kelly Thrasher, who all received a master's degree in educational leadership from UW Oshkosh in May 2008, shared their project, "We are More than a Flesh Colored Crayon," which centers on a more inclusive curriculum through the use of multicultural and anti-bias materials in all aspects of the school day.

The two-year project — started with a grant from Teaching Tolerance, an educational branch of the Southern Poverty Law Center — included a first-grade curriculum guide comprised of both lesson plans and reflections of the teachers' challenges, frustrations and triumphs with stories like "Nah nah nah nah boo boo, I have more feathers than you," "Privilege," "The First Thanksgiving," "Ramadan" and "The Hardest Thing I Ever Did."

A major component of the program incorporated a service project with Sister Mary Ayiku of Ghana, West Africa. Ayiku, a graduate student at UWO, has worked extensively with the four teachers in their classroom. The students, faculty, staff and community of Clay Lamberton Elementary School have completed a variety of projects to raise funds and supplies for the orphan school children from Ayiku's home school. The first-grade students compiled a book of self-portraits and letters that traveled to Ghana and received letters in return from students in Ghana.

After two years, the teachers admit they are just on the edge of really understanding the need for better inclusion of multicultural education. At the conference, they learned that they are not the only educators who believe in moving forward — such as when the author of a national best-selling early childhood book came to their session for ideas.

Janice Stark is the advancement officer for the College of Education and Human Services. Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to contribute calendar items, campus announcements and other good news to UW Oshkosh Today.

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